

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SALE OF M-16'S TO ZAIRE AND MILITARY COOPERATION
IN GENERAL

REF KINSHASA 7690

1. LISTENING TO MOBUTU TALK PASSIONATELY ABOUT HIS NEED FOR AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM AND TANKS WAS SOBERING EXPERIENCE FOR ONE ACCUSTOMED TO RELATIVELY RATIONAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN WASHINGTON. SURELY MOBUTU KNOWS, I ASKED MYSELF, THAT SPECTOR OF UGANDAN TANK ATTACK INTO NORTHEAST IS RIDICULOUS. NOT ONLY IS TERRAIN NOT SUITABLE FOR TANKS, AT LEAST AS TANKS ARE HANDLED BY UGANDANS, BUT UGANDANS WOULD BE NOWHERE IF THEY SUCCEEDED. AT MOST UGANDANS COULD MAKE SMALL INTRUSION WHICH WOULD BE THREAT TO MOBUTU'S PRIDE BUT HARDLY TO ZAIRE. EMPHASIS ON AIR DEFENSE NEEDS ALSO STRUCK ME AS HAVING FANTASY-LIKE QUALITY TO IT.

2. WHILE I MAKE NO CLAIMS OF EXPERT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MOBUTU, I AM PERSUADED THAT HE IS AMONG MORE ASTUTE POLITICAL FIGURES IN WORLD TODAY AND THAT MANY OF HIS PAST SCHEMES, FOR EXAMPLE, INGA AND CURRENT MPR SEMINAR, WHICH INITIALLY WERE WIDELY VIEWED AS WILD, EVENTUALLY PROVED TO MAKE REAL SENSE, AT LEAST FOR HIM. THUS, MY PRESUMPTION IS THAT MOBUTU IS TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. ACCORDINGLY, ONE MUST ASK WHAT DOES HE REALLY HAVE ON

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HIS MIND?

3. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THERE ARE TWO PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATIONS: FIRST, HE MIGHT BE UNDER GREAT PRESSURE FROM HIS MILITARY TO SUPPLY THEM WITH MODERN GADGETS, BUT WE HAVE NO INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF THIS WHATSOEVER. QUITE THE CONTRARY, HE SEEMS TO HAVE SPLIT POTENTIAL POWER CENTERS IN THE MILITARY AND TO BE PLAYING LEADING ACTORS OFF AGAINST EACH OTHER QUITE NICELY. SECOND, ANGOLA. EVERYTHING WE KNOW SUPPORTS THEORY THAT ANGOLA IS MOBUTU'S PRIMARY PRE-OCCUPATION THESE DAYS. HE IS EXPERIENCED ENOUGH TO KNOW BOTH THAT MORE MILITARY CAPACITY WOULD ENHANCE HIS BARGAINING POWER AND TO RECOGNIZE DANGER THAT SOME POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS, E.G., UDI MOVEMENT BY ANGOLAN WHITES SUPPORTED BY SOUTH AFRICA MIGHT FORCE HIM TO INTERVENE MILITARILY. REALISTICALLY HE MUST KNOW THAT HIS FORCES - BELGIAN MILITARY HERE DERIDE FAZ CAPABILITIES - COULD HAVE HARD GOING AND THAT DISASTROUS FOREIGN ADVENTURES COULD LEAD TO HIS DOWNFALL. YET AS IDIOTIC AS IT SEEMS THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE GOZ REACTION TO ONE MYSTERIOUS HELICOPTER INTRUSION AT INGA (PRESUMABLY FROM CABINDA) BORDERED ON PANIC. MOBUTU MAY THINK THAT WERE HIS HAND FORCED IN ANGOLA, HE WOULD FACE AN AERIAL COUNTERTHRUST EITHER FROM PORTUGUESE FORCES OR FROM SOUTH AFRICA. ALSO USE OF TANKS IN NORTHERN ANGOLA OR CABINDA BY ZAIROIS MAKES MORE SENSE THAN AGAINST AMIN.

4. I BELIEVE MOBUTU IS SINCERE IN SEEKING NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT FOR ANGOLA AND IN SAYING TO PRESERVE PEACE ONE PREPARES FOR WAR. YET AS HE PUSHES HIMSELF FORWARD - AS THE LEADER OF AFRICAN LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND AS GOZ TELEVISION - WIDELY WATCHED IN KINSHASA AT LEAST - DAILY CARRIES SPOTS ABOUT NEED TO DRIVE COLONIAL "VULTURES" FROM ANGOLA, NAMIBIA, RHODESIA, AND RSA, INTERSPERSED WITH PICTURES ZAIRIAN COMBAT TRAINING AND LOUD BURSTS MACHINE GUN FIRE, ONE MUST ASK IF MOBUTU COULD EASILY DISENGAGE FROM ACTIVIST LINE WERE HIS PREFERRED COURSE OF ACTION - NEGOTIATIONS WITH SPINOLA - NOT TO WORK OUT.

5. INCIDENTALLY, I HAVE DISCUSSED FOREGOING WITH MY DCM AND POLITICAL COUNSELOR AND FIND SECRET

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THAT THEIR VIEWS IN HIS ADMITTEDLY UNCERTAIN AREA DIFFER SOMEWHAT FROM MINE. THEY THINK THAT MOBUTU (POSSIBLY AS A RESULT OF HIS RECENT MEETINGS WITH NYERERE) MAY REALLY BE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT AMIN MIGHT TRY TO DO WITH HIS SOVIET TANKS. THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR THINKS I HAVE PLAYED DOWN TOO MUCH MOBUTU'S DESIRE TO KEEP THE ARMED FORCES HAPPY WITH MODERN WEAPONRY. ZAMISH TENDS MY WAY. HE ALSO DOUBTS THAT MOBUTU WOULD

INTERVENE MILITARILY IN ANGOLA IF THERE WERE A UDI ATTEMPT THERE. SO DO I, BUT HE WOULD BE BOTH TEMPTED AND PRESSED TO DO SO AND I RATE POSSIBILITY AS MORE REAL THAN HE. WE ALL THINK MOBUTU'S CHIEF AIM IS TO ENHANCE HIS MILITARY CAPABILITY IN ORDER TO GIVE HIM A WIDER SPECTRUM OF OPTION WITH WHICH TO DEAL WITH A NUMBER OF CONTINGENCIES (E.G. DETER AN ATTEMPT BY NGOUABI TO SEIZE CABINDA; DEFEND BAS ZAIRE AGAINST A FUTURE HOSTILE REGIME IN ANGOLA). THEY WOULD HAVE PREFERRED ME TO HOLD UP SENDING MY OWN THOUGHTS ON THIS SUBJECT UNTIL WE HAVE HAD OUR INITIAL MEETING WITH MOLONGYA AND SOUNDED HIM OUT FURTHER.

6. ENOUGH SPECULATION. WE ARE PREPARING FOR TALKS ALTHOUGH WE STILL HAVE NOT HEARD FROM GENERAL MOLONGYA. WE PLAN TO REVIEW C-130 SITUATION IN DETAIL. WE WOULD THEN HOPE SPEND TIME DISCUSSING PRICES, QUANTITIES AND DELIVERY DATES FOR M-16'S. FOR THIS DOD INPUT IS URGENTLY NEEDED. RE TANKS, AIR DEFENSE, AND OTHER ITEMS, WE HOPE TO DRAW ZAIRIAN MILITARY OUT REGARDING (A) THREAT AS THEY SEE IT; (B) ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF MEETING IT, E.G., ANTI-TANK WEAPONS AND USE MIRAGES ALREADY ON ORDER ;(C) TOTAL FUNDING GOZ MIGHT DEVOTE THESE AND OTHER DEFENSE NEEDS; AND (D) MINIMUM HARDWARE WHICH MIGHT MEET PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS FOR REASSURANCE HERE. EVENTUALLY, I WOULD HOPE TO BROADEN DISCUSSIONS TO INCLUDE RATIONAL CONSIDERATION OF TRADEOFFS BETWEEN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ON ONE HAND AND AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM ON OTHER. HAD I PUSHED THAT LINE MONDAY, HOWEVER, I WOULD HAVE BEEN BLOWN OUT OF MOBUTU'S OFFICE.

7. INCIDENTALLY, DO WE CARE, AND IF SO, HOW STRONGLY,
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IF SOVIETS JOIN US, PRC, NORTH KOREANS, FRENCH, ITALIANS, AND BELGIANS AS SIGNIFICANT ARMS MERCHANTS IN ZAIRE? MY TENTATIVE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS IS (A) YES, PARTICULARLY SINCE SOVIET MISSILE SYSTEM WOULD PERFORCE BE ACCOMPANIED BY LARGE NUMBER TECHNICAL ADVISERS, AND (B) NOT ENOUGH TO RESPOND AFFIRMATIVELY TO EVERY MOBUTU REQUEST. THEREFORE, WE WILL WORK FOR CAREFUL ASSESSMENT OF MINIMUM US COMMITMENT LIKELY TO MAINTAIN OUR HIGHLY FAVORABLE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC POSITION HERE. HINTON

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